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**SOCIALIST DISCUSSION JOURNAL  
TOWARDS BETTER UNDERSTANDING**

# FORUM

## The Meaning of Education

The obvious has often to be pointed. Too often, however, it is laid down as a triumphant conclusion instead of a point of departure. To say that education under capitalism is education for capitalism is to utter a truth, but a not-very-profound one. Its place is at the beginning, not the end.

It is far better, in fact, to consider that that is the object of educational systems in all epochs. Education is the process of adapting and equipping children for the world in which they live: implanting morality, fostering attitudes and habits, teaching the basic skills which that world requires. Primitive peoples educate their children functionally, having them learn the facts of physical life, the laws of social life and the techniques of economic life from direct contact. Civilized systems are more complex, less direct, but just as functional.

A single example may show what is meant. A hundred years ago Denmark had a public-school system which aimed at producing gentlemen-farmers; its reverences were for the land and the humanities. Eighty years ago the German states next door became a single nation-state, swelling and stiffening with aggressive nationalism. In a couple of decades, the Danish system changed to meet the new situation; its head-

masters became Kaptains, its tone loudly patriotic.

All education works like that, aiming at no more and no less than to fit the young to live in and maintain their society—not as a rulers' conspiracy, but as a necessary function. Every community, every society must have it, and the shape it takes is generally the shape of society's dominant economic unit. Thus, in communal, tribal groups, education is communal or through the family; thus, since we live in a factory world our education is given in factories and on factory lines.

The Acts of 1870 and 1871 were not a new departure but the completion and regularization of a process which had been going on through the nineteenth century. It is wrong to suppose—as many people do—that non-one could read or write before there were Board schools. In the Middle Ages, priests were teachers; Chaucer describes the Clerk of Oxenford:—

“... gladly would he learn, and gladly teach.”

At all times there was a good deal of family education, and apprenticeship to most crafts implied learning the three Rs.

It was estimated in 1850 that eight million, or just under a quarter, of the population of Britain could neither read nor write. The well-to-do had their own schools, of course; the working population's chief instructors were the Church of England's “National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church” and the Nonconformist “British and Foreign School Society.” In addition, there were the Ragged Schools, Sunday Schools the Dames' Schools (fivepence or sixpence a week), and a host of unclassifiable desultory day or evening schools. All predominantly in the towns, of course; in Middlesex and Surrey, the London counties, illiteracy was only half what it was elsewhere.

If it is wrong to assume general illiteracy before the Education Acts, it would be equally wrong to assume universal literacy after them. For all the outcry in recent years about unlettered adolescents, there was undoubtedly more sheer illiteracy forty-five years ago than there is now. It was concealed by teachers, simply because there was a “payment-by-results” system in which

inspectors could and did recommend pay reduction for teachers whose charges showed lack of reading; nevertheless, the Army before 1914 had to teach a large proportion of its recruits to read from the C-A-T: cat stage.

What actually happens in the State educational system? To start, all schooling from eleven upwards has been categorized into grammar, technical and “modern” since the 1944 Education Act was given effect. All children must stay at school until they are fifteen; it is not so widely known that an Education Act as far back as 1921 empowered and recommended local authorities to extend the leaving age to fifteen, but none was known to do so. Again, the question of “education economies” is no new one. Educational reform has always been directed by the needs of major industry and resisted by the greengrocers on the town councils, who in this case wanted to lose neither their seats by a rise in the rates nor their cheap labour by a rise in the school-leaving age.

Up to eleven, schooling is “primary”—that is, preliminary to the selection-by-examination for the three types of secondary education. In fact, however, the selection begins three or four years earlier. Practically all infant and junior schools use the “streaming” method, by which children are graded according to ability as A, B and C. “A's” are feasible scholarship-winners and are egged-on and provided-for accordingly; “C's” are the sub-standard ones, the slow, recalcitrant and defective. In theory, “C” children are carefully tended, receiving special attention to help them overcome their difficulties. The practice, however, is usually rather different. A few teachers do specialize in working with backward children. Mostly, however, they come in for the worst accommodation and equipment and their teachers are the new being tried-out, the old who have been tried too often, and those who have drawn badly in the annual lottery for classes.

That does not necessarily imply callousness or indifference on the part of head teachers or education authorities. The pressure for scholarships is so great that the “A's” virtually *have* to be given the best of whatever there is. In any town, perhaps 3,500 children compete every year for 200

### IN THIS ISSUE

JOHN STEINBECK.

Another “Writers and Society” article.

NO UNITY AND NO OPPOSITES.

Part 3 of “Do We Need the Dialectic?”

CAPITALISM IN 1956.

Cuttings from a current Survey.

SOVIET POST-MORTEM ON STALIN.

From official Russian sources.

STUDY CLASS NOTES

The opinions expressed in FORUM are those of the individual writers, and are not to be taken as the Socialist Party's official views.

grammar school places—one in six for the "A" children. And if any school fails to get its quota, then the school managers, the inspectors and the parents all want to know why.

The snobbery and jealousy over scholarships is remarkable. Otherwise sane and moderate people will pay ten shillings an hour for coaching, promise gold watches and bicycles as rewards for passing, and nag their children into neurasthenia over "the scholarship." The strongest motive of all is the snob one. Cyril goes to a *nice* school where they have to wear a uniform—and he's learning *French* now. From this point of view it matters not that Cyril will probably languish unhappily at the bottom of the form for five years and end up a badly-paid clerk in a shipping office: better to serve in heaven than reign in hell.

The question of what is actually proved by intelligence tests and examinations will be dealt with later. The more important point at this juncture is the continual creaming-off process which goes on at every stage of the educational system. Starting in the earliest years, there is repeated selection of the most suitable children for training as officers and N.C.O.'s. in the wage-earning army. It continues after eleven; there are subsidiary examinations and courses of all kinds in the secondary schools to ensure that industry gets just what it wants. Ultimately, about three-fifths of the population of this country receives "secondary modern" education—that is, elementary schooling aimed at producing clerks, artisans, shop assistants, factory workers and labourers.

The scope of this kind of elementary education has widened tremendously in

recent years. A secondary modern school to-day provides for an extensive range of activities. Apart from what is now accepted as the ordinary classroom curriculum of English, mathematics, history, science, geography and so on, there are rooms and teachers for art, handicrafts, woodwork, metalwork, plastics, gardening, housecraft and needlework; course in current affairs; facilities for social activities, films, games and physical exercise.

This is the sort of thing which superficial thought snatches as an indication of tremendous improvement in working-class conditions. In fact, the change in the content of popular education is a product of changed capitalist needs. Take, for example, the girl learning cookery and laundering in the housecraft room of a modern secondary school. She has a trained instructor, and is taught in a room equipped with electric cookers, washing machines, refrigerators and every relevant gadget.

She is being educated in two ways. First, in necessary skills which her grandmother learned "in service" or in the home, ways which have disappeared as the nature of both upper-class and working-class homes has changed. And second, she is being educated as a consumer, a future buyer in the market for new kinds of domestic goods. She grows up to regard electric labour-savers as part of her way of life: a future hire-purchase customer ready-made.

What part does religion play in education? The 1944 Act gave it a stronger footing than it had formerly had in schools, by making a daily religious assembly compulsory and laying down syllabuses of religious instruc-

tion (formerly dependent chiefly on the teachers' disposition). The training of teachers originally was entirely in the hands of religious bodies, but now there is a fair number of training colleges run by local education authorities. It is still generally assumed that teachers should be religious people, however. The Education Act allows teachers to withdraw from all religious business and lays down that they shall not be penalised for doing so. They are, all the same: an openly atheistic teacher's chances of advancement are small, and he can have things made hot for him by a truly Christian headmaster.

The truth is that schools *do* educate—in the strictest sense of the word. *Ex ducere* is to lead forth, *educere* is to draw out, and our educational system draws out of children their potential value to capitalism and drills them accordingly in skills and attitudes. There is a feeling prevalent even among Socialists that, nevertheless, one gets something necessary and worthwhile out of elementary schooling. Don't believe it. If that were the question, children would learn as much and more by running the streets all day. Indeed, if you consider that 30 per cent. of school leavers are classed as "backward readers" (which includes illiterates), it seems obvious that they could hardly learn less.

R. COSTER.

*This is the first of three articles. The next, in the October-November FORUM will deal with intelligence tests, examinations and the position of teachers.*

## Writers and Society—3

# JOHN STEINBECK

John Steinbeck is a novelist who fits better than most into the category of "writers about society." He has fairly consistently, at least in the 'thirties, written of the poor, the outcasts and misfits in society, and of their sufferings. This is not to say that he belongs to that group of "social realists" of the 'thirties with their stilted, unfeeling proletarian plots that followed the party line. As F. J. Hoffman says in *The Modern Novel in America*, Steinbeck is one of those "whose work lifts them above the dead level of the proletarian formula novel."

*Grapes of Wrath*, which is perhaps his best known work, deals with a group of migrant fruit-pickers in the U.S.A. It tells of a farming family, dispossessed of their land, who trek across America in an ancient, battered truck to find work picking fruit in California. When they arrive in the promised land, they find that bad food, appalling living conditions and brutality is the lot of the "Okies," as the migrants are called. They

find that thousands upon thousands of the unemployed and dispossessed have come to California, like themselves attracted by handbills promising high wages. Not only are the unprotected and unorganised "Okies" beaten and cheated by the fruit growers, but they are hated by the local inhabitants, who see in them a threat to their livelihood and property.

The elder boy in the family, Tom, is released from prison on parole, and becomes embittered by the treatment that his family receives at the hands of the fruit growers, and, when his friend is murdered by strike-breakers, he kills one of them and becomes a renegade.

This novel attained great popularity when it was published (1939), and created quite a furore, and eventually the government had to take steps to provide for the "Okies" reasonable living quarters and some kind of protection against the fruit-growers. The message of the book, however, is still relevant,

for the migrant workers are still the worst-paid and least organised section of the American working class. In spite of some rather laboured symbolism, and philosophical reflections of the fatalistic kind, this novel is a most moving and impressive study of the struggles of a section of the subject-class.

Steinbeck's sympathy for the oppressed appears in another novel, *In Dubious Battle*, which is a story of a strike among fruit-pickers in the Torgas Valley, and it could be said that *Grapes of Wrath* developed directly from this work, in spite of the differences in presentation. The story is largely an account of the reactions of the three principal characters to the strike—the experienced strike-leader, the novice, and a doctor who is in the role of an observer. The discussions that take place between the three men have a certain amount of interest, and the study of the reactions of the individuals concerned makes this an unusual novel that stands out among the many that the depression brought

forth dealing with similar subject-matter. The strike leaders are Communists, but of a peculiar kind. Steinbeck himself wrote: "My information for this book came mostly from Irish and Italian Communists whose training was in the field, not in the drawing room. They don't believe in ideologies and ideal tactics. They just do what they can under the circumstances."

In this book also, Steinbeck's somewhat confused philosophy appears (in this case from the mouth of the doctor), although it must be said in fairness to him that he is always interesting, and sometimes rings the bell, as when the tyro Jim suggests that the violence of the conflict is necessary and that one "ought to think only of the end; out of this struggle a good thing is going to grow," to which the doctor replies that "in his little experience, the end is never very different in its nature to the means."

The characters who seem particularly to appeal to Steinbeck are the tramps, the lazy, good-natured, unemployable natives of the poor quarters of the Californian coastal towns. *Cannery Row* (1945) and *Tortilla Flat* (1935) both deal with groups of this kind, the latter, improbable though it may seem, being based on the Arthurian legend. This book deals with a group of Mexicans and their leader, Danny, who are by normal capitalist standards, misfits. It is a somewhat episodic series of adventures of this group, and their struggle (if such a term can be used) to exist happily without working. Although no more than a folk-tale, the book is extremely successful in holding one's interest and providing entertainment, which is more than one can say for ninety per cent. of the output of modern fiction writers.

*Cannery Row* is a similar tale, also episodic in character, but this time about a group of white vagabonds. Both of these books, although lacking the sociological punch of the two earlier-mentioned books, are extremely readable accounts of what was, and probably still is, an aspect of American life. *The Wayward Bus* (1947) is also similar in character, and one of Steinbeck's last published works, *Sweet Thursday*, is a sequel to *Cannery Row*. The characters are, in the main, the same as in the earlier book, and the action takes place after the last war. The book is amusing enough, but hardly justifies the re-opening of a mine that Steinbeck had already fully worked out.

Of *Mice and Men*, another of Steinbeck's more well-known novels, is also about migrant workers, but this time it is a story of two individuals. One is a feeble-minded lumbering giant, and the other a short, tough man who has become the other's protector and guide. It is a short, well-constructed book, which packs into its pages a wealth of telling description and quite convincing action and dialogue.

Lennie, the giant, has murderous impulses, more from animal fear than from badness, and George, his protector, is constantly struggling to prevent Lennie from getting

into trouble. The tragic climax is extremely taut and moving, and the novel as a whole is certainly one of Steinbeck's more successful ventures.

A later novel, *The Moon is Down*, (also published in play form) seems to be a regression from the values that Steinbeck appeared to uphold in his earlier work. This story of an occupied country (presumably Norway) during the last war, appears to have been written more with an eye on Hollywood than on social problems, and in fact the novel was turned into a play and film script almost without alteration. The point that it makes is that the human spirit cannot be broken, and that an occupying power will never be able to force the submission of a "free people." It certainly does not give an accurate picture of the occupied countries, but as it was a wartime production, this is hardly surprising. As with the majority of Western writers and intellectuals, the destruction of fascism presumably became the most pressing need in Steinbeck's eyes.

Steinbeck's earlier novels, such as *Cup of Gold* and *The Pastures of Heaven*, are not particularly interesting, as they contain all the faults of the later books, without any of their compensating merits. The short stories are somewhat better, but here too, one is confronted with the top-heavy philosophy and a preoccupation with plants, insects and animals.

Edmund Wilson, on *The Boys in the Back Room*, has levelled much constructive criticism at Steinbeck and his work, but he does him less than justice when he suggests that all of Steinbeck's characters are lacking in humanity, and that they are presented in a clinical detached way in the manner of white mice or insects in the dissecting room.

It is true that Steinbeck, who is a keen biologist, is engrossed in the minutiae of the animal and plant kingdoms, and is especially fascinated by the wanton slaughter that goes on in them. In the early pages of *The Grapes of Wrath*, for instance, there is a lengthy account of a turtle laboriously making its way across a field to the road. There are many examples of this kind of thing in Steinbeck, and apart from the symbolism, they add little or nothing to the plots or action of his stories, except when they are brought in as an incidental activity of biologically-minded characters (as with Doc, in *Sweet Thursday*).

The preoccupation with biology, however, is little more than a personal foible, and does not affect Steinbeck's presentation of his characters to any real extent. Tom Joad, Ma, Casey and the others in *Grapes of Wrath* could not, by any stretch of the imagination, be described as clinical studies, and in fact their humanity and suffering is so skilfully presented as to make them completely convincing. Edmund Wilson himself recognised one aspect of this when he wrote "there remains behind the journalism, the theatricalities, and the tricks of his other

books, a mind which does seem first-rate in its unpanicky scrutiny of life."

It could be said with some justification, that after his violence and fervour during the depression, Steinbeck has dried up, said nothing further of any importance, and is merely settling down to a financially stable existence producing light, harmless, Hollywood-intended works with little or no bearing upon society or its problems. It is somewhat early in Steinbeck's career to make such a judgment, however, and one can only hope that Steinbeck will turn his attention and skill to the many problems that America offers to the intelligent writer. Even if this does not happen, Steinbeck will have already earned a niche in the not overcrowded gallery of stimulating writers about society.

A.W.I.

## Study Class Notes

(Concluded from page 208)

2. *Morality*. Chivalry, chastity, co-relatives of land—inheritance customs. Divorce permitted when no heir. Usury very immoral. Worst possible crime was felony. i.e., breach of faith with overlord.

### C. HISTORICAL FUNCTION.

The development of a world market *via* the advancement of productive technique as employed in handicrafts

*Definition*: Feudalism is a system of society based upon land tenure, subject to military and/or agricultural service.

### BOOKS.

Engels: *Origin of the Family*. Adams: *Feudalism* (Encyclopædia Britannica 1911 Edition). Bogdanov: *Short Course of Economic Science*. Stenton: *English Feudalism*. Gibbins: *Industrial History of England*.

There have been a good many funny things said and written about hardupishness, but the reality is not funny, for all that. It is not funny to have to haggle over pennies. It isn't funny to be thought mean and stingy. It isn't funny to be shabby, and to be ashamed of your address. No, there is nothing at all funny in poverty—to the poor. . . A poor man is despised the whole world over; despised as much by a Christian as by a lord, as much by a demagogue as by a footman, and not all the copy-book maxims set for ink-stained youth will make him respected. Appearances are everything, so far as human opinion goes; and the man who will walk down Piccadilly arm in arm with the most notorious scamp in London, provided he is a well-dressed one, will slink up a back street to say a couple of words to a seedy-looking gentleman.

*The Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow*

—Jerome K. Jerome.

# Do We Need the Dialectic?

## 3—No Unity and No Opposites

The three major dialectical formulæ, as has already been stated, are the unity of opposites, the negation of the negation, and the transformation of quantity into quality and *vice-versa*. The first, which may be held to be an overall definition of the dialectic, holds that there can be no such thing as absolute opposition. Opposites are always related. Thus, there can be no North pole without a South pole, no negative without a positive—just as a way out *via* the street door is a way in.

Capitalism itself may be regarded as a unity of opposites because in such a society the two classes are inseparably connected and yet mutually opposed. Neither class can develop without the other. The workers as a class cannot live without selling their productive energies to the capitalists, and the capitalists cannot exist as a class without exploiting the workers. It is from this basic social relationship that the contradictions of Capitalism spring.

The negation of the negation can be socially exemplified by stating that the small and scattered private property of the pre-industrialist capitalist era was negated by large-scale capitalist ownership, which in turn will be negated by the social ownership of the means and instruments of wealth production.

The transformation of quantity into quality seeks from the standpoint of social investigation to show that major social changes cannot be accounted for by evolutionary processes. Marxism does not deny the evolutionary development of society. Indeed, it delineates and underscores the evolutionary character of the social forces and insists that there can be no qualitative social change without a prior quantitative development. It holds that all revolutions are but movements in a general evolutionary development of society. Nevertheless, it insists that any social transformation constitutes a "leap" or a "break." While these leaps or breaks are intimately bound up with previous development, they nevertheless are points of departure from old evolutionary patterns to new ones.

This dialectical formula—the change of quantity into quality—seems to me to have a genuine methodological value insofar as it deals with historical analysis and the dynamic of social change. I fail to see, however, that it has any methodological validity in all or even the majority of other fields of investigation, or that conversely it can be regarded as a universal law of nature. In either case, as has already been pointed out, the change of quantity into quality cannot be both a scientific postulate and a universal law (although Engels himself seemed to think it could).

The examples given by Engels of the transformation of quantity into quality are

to be found in Hegel's *Logic*. Thus we have the conversion of water into ice, water into steam, acorns into oak trees, etc. In fact, some dialecticians have gone so far as to assert that the transition of the number—9 to 10 or 99 to 100 constitutes a dialectical leap. It may be added that the examples of leaps from quantity to quality given by Hegel and Engels are quite arbitrarily selected, and it does not at all follow from them that all quantitative growth must lead to qualitative change. Baby elephants only grow into bigger elephants and little fleas into bigger fleas. And while little drops of water may by quantitative addition become a puddle, pond or lake, they are always water. Likewise, no increase in the amount of lead will at some quantitative point convert it into gold.

Again, if everything were in a process of becoming and changing into something qualitatively different, then scientific investigation in such a state of affairs would be impossible. Indeed, in most scientific systems change is so imperceptible that they can be regarded as static for all practical purposes. One can hardly suppose that scientific isolates can be made from inherently unstable and qualitatively changing situations.

It is also not true to say that every quality has a quantitative aspect. There is no yardstick or quantitative measure for such things as mercy, charity and kindness. It is even doubtful if Intelligence Quotients quantitatively assess something called intelligence. One can enumerate whole ranges of qualities for which there are no corresponding quantities. So much, then, for the alleged universality of the transformation of quantity into quality.

Engels, in his attempt to universalize the dialectic—and here he has been followed by the Soviet dialecticians—extended it in such a way as to include the quantitative and qualitative changes which occur in physics and chemistry. Here Engels and those who have followed him seem to exhibit considerable confusion of thought as to the role of the dialectic. The dialectic in both its traditional and actual meaning had always made consciousness central to its purpose, yet we find Engels applying it indiscriminately to non-animate processes. If, of course, Engels was merely asserting that the dialectic is identical with the concept of physical change then he was merely repeating a scientific commonplace of his time. But this is to deny the distinctive character of the dialectic that its advocates have claimed for it.

Properly understood, the dialectic means that in any inclusive whole there are elements which are opposed in such a way that the self-expansion of each is in conflict with the other. Each element, while only a part of the whole, strives to include the whole. This

mutual antagonism brings about a non-equilibrium in the situation which can only be overcome by the rejection of certain features of the opposing elements and the fusing of other features which are retained and re-orientated into a new or higher synthesis or equilibrium. The new synthesis in turn is subject to internal oppositions and the resulting tensions leading again to a higher phase. Whatever may be the validity of such a view it cannot merely be identified with physical change, and if Engels did think that the dialectic was something superior to the scientific account of changes in natural phenomena, he never explained in what way.

Again, from a strictly dialectical standpoint the transformation of quantity into quality and *vice-versa* are held to be irreversible. This, however, is inconsistent with the claims of the dialecticians, who are fond of using the combination of chemical elements into new synthesis as illustrations of dialectical laws. Such combinations as a general rule can be re-precipitated into their original elements, thus contravening the "dialectical" laws. Even the alleged dialectical union of oxygen and hydrogen into water can be reconstituted into the original elements by passing an electric current through it.

Not only did Engels make the concept of physical change synonymous with the dialectic, but also the dialectic identical with biological development or evolution. Indeed, I think I am right in saying that there is a view in the Socialist Party that holds that the dialectic is merely another name for evolution. But any reading of Engels in *Anti-Duhring* suggests that the dialectic had other implications for him; indeed, both Marx and Engels believed that the theory of evolution—Darwinism—suffered from certain inadequacies. Actually, Engels held that organic as well as inorganic development was dialectical and not merely evolutionary.

It could be said that if all Engels was offering was an explanation of the rhythm of development based on the outcome of scientific investigation, then it did not need the elaborate and confused procedures of the dialectic to give expression to it. The dialectic added nothing to, nor in any way clarified, existing knowledge; it merely confused that knowledge. Surely, once the data of any aspect of biology or any other science is sufficiently organized, a clear and consistent account of it can be given without recourse to such doubtful artifices as quantity and quality, the unity of opposites and the negation of the negation.

But Engels, it seems, was attempting to do more than describe physical change and evolutionary processes; he was (*a la Hegel*) attempting to construct reality in accordance

with a dialectical principle, to bring all nature, society and thinking under one grand unifying concept. Engels could no more do this than Hegel. Believing that contradictions existed in phenomena, he was forced to an animistic conception of matter and so to a teleology of nature.

Even the examples used by Engels to illustrate the law of the transformation of quantity into quality do not prove the law. Thus, he tells us in *Anti-Duhring* that a grain of barley germinates and dies and from it arises a plant—the negation of the grain. This plant grows and finally produces a stalk, at the end of which are further grains of barley. When these have ripened the stalk dies—is negated—and as a result of this negation of the negation the original grain of barley is multiplied tenfold. Leaving aside the fact that it is difficult to see how this involves any logical contradiction, this negation of a negation has simply resulted in a quantitative change, ten grains of barley for one. In short, the grains remain barley, and the qualitative change or higher reformation which is presupposed on the dialectic has not taken place.

It has often been said, and I believe it has been repeated by many members of the Party both past and present, that at least dialectical logic is superior to formal logic. While it may be true that the interconnection of phenomena is a fruitful way of looking at things, it does not follow that this interconnectedness can be subsumed under a logic, dialectical or otherwise. Indeed, a logic which attempts to construct reality and make that reality conform to its principles is certainly on highly dangerous ground. While one is mindful, of course, of the inadequacies of formal logic, it does seem that the attacks made on it by our “dialecticians” are a little wide of the mark.

In the first place it is not the task of formal logic to explain the nature of reality—which dialectical logic claims to do—but to deal with logical propositions. All that formal logic asserts is that we must be consistent in our use of terms and symbols. Thus, if we make a distinction between that which is A and that which is not A, we cannot say that it is A and not A at the same time and in the same respect. Though, if one is to believe some would-be exponents of dialectics, one is obliged to believe that it is possible to assert this! It has been argued by Soviet dialecticians that A can never equal A because no two things are ever the same. Thus, a hundredweight of sand will never equal another hundredweight since a finer scale will always reveal a difference.

It is asserted also that if A is equal to A then it does not change, but seeing that everything changes, anything which does not change does not exist. But when we say “A equals A,” we are not talking about things or events but about logical thinking. What we are concerned about is that our terms and references are consistent with each other. The dialectician, in fact, cannot even say that hundredweights of sand are

unequal unless the terms he uses are identical.

I remember, in my youth in the Party, imbibing the dubious philosophy of Dietzgen *via* Casey’s *Thinking* (still sold, I believe, by the Party). In this application of dialectical logic and its alleged superiority over formal logic we were informed that formal logic asserts that a door which is shut cannot be open. Dialectical logic, on the other hand, sets out to show that this is not categorically true. Thus, a door which is shut to human beings can be open to a microbe. All this means is that the circumstanced situation which makes a door shut to a man is not that which makes it shut to a microbe. Nevertheless, formal logic can still consistently maintain that a closed door cannot be an open one at the same time and in precisely the same way. If the statement: “This door is shut under the conditions specified” does not exclude the statement: “This door is open,” it becomes meaningless. For that reason, the charges of the “dialecticians” against the inadequacies of formal logic are inadequate to the point of flippancy. To recap, the function of logic is not concerned with the nature of reality but with consistent statements involved in argumentation and propositions.

Again, the dialectical formulation that A can be not A at one and the same time conflicts with Marxism itself. From its own theoretical standpoint Capitalism cannot also be Socialism. Again Marxists assert—along with Marx and Engels—that the major turning points in history have offered only two possible alternatives. Because we say Socialism is the only alternative to Capitalism we are committed in this important respect to asserting that A cannot be A and not A in the same context.

Perhaps one of the most serious charges against Engels is his use of the term “contradiction.” It is true that when we use the expression “the contradictions of capitalism” we are referring, of course, to the consequences and incompatibilities resulting from a given social organization—and we are dealing with institutions, men’s activities, their hopes, aspirations and wills. In this light the term is intelligible. It is only when we transfer it to physical relationships that it takes on the character of obscurantism.

It is true that Hegel saw contradictions in “things,” but at least they were hypostasized into forms of a divine logic; in the last instance things, events and occurrences could with Hegel be dissolved into a series of ascending logical propositions. For Hegel the dialectical process was the exhaustion of inconsistencies, through triadic phases until final unity was reached. Engels had no warrant for transferring this to Nature, unless it was on the assumption that Nature possessed the attributes of the divine. Contradictions in this sense then are logical contradictions and as such belong to thinking not to things. When Engels tells us that contradiction is the dynamic of the development of phenomena, not only is the state-

ment utterly confused but it reeks with teleological implications.

Again, when Engels uses the word “opposition,” he does so in many different and often incompatible ways. We can readily understand what is meant by class opposition and conflict, but in what sense are we to understand opposition and conflict as modes of behaviour of natural phenomena? It is true that we can recognize contrast and juxtaposition in physical relations, but to try to make a transcendental principle of this opposition is, when it is not obscurantist, definitely mystical. Even Hegel viewed the dialectical categories, along with opposition and conflict, as the outcome of a logical teleology. He would never have dreamed of attributing them to the behaviour of matter itself. Indeed, one can only say that if matter does behave in this way then it is no longer matter in the sense we understand it. The trouble with Engels was that he himself used the term “dialectic” in many and often incompatible ways. He did certainly use it at times as if the dialectic were a universal law which regulated and governed the cosmic process.

To be more specific on this question of opposition and conflict constituting the driving force of all development—the dialecticians following Engels assert that matter is in conflict with motion and it is this conflict which produces a unity of opposites. Such language does not tell us anything about matter and motion or matter and energy, and where it is not misleading it is harmful. Physicists will agree that matter can be turned into energy and energy into matter; in short, they are interchangeable. But to call them a unity of opposites adds nothing to our knowledge. Indeed, the dialecticians’ attempt to construct matter and energy into a unity of opposites not only raises some awkward implications for them but places them in something of a dilemma.

In the first place, if the law of the unity of opposites is a valid law, we would want to know in *what way* the conflict of matter and motion brings about unity of opposites. According to this law, matter possesses the property of motion, and it is the conflict between matter and motion which brings this about. Apart from the argy-bargy, at this is very confusing and leads to a dualistic interpretation. Thus if, as the dialecticians tell us, the activity of the unity of opposites must be an intrinsic activity, then there must be some fundamental activity common to them both. What this is, the dialecticians have never indicated in the slightest; or are we forced to the conception that each pole of the opposites has its own dynamic mode of activity and the two in some way or other coalesce?

Not only are the dialecticians unable to account for the presence of a fundamental activity common to both matter and motion—at least, not in any scientific sense: they have not provided any means of accounting for some autonomous activity generated at the poles of this unity of opposites. We must

(Continued on page 208)

# CAPITALISM in 1956

## Cuttings from the "Financial Times" Survey of British Industry

Indeed, low price no longer has the powerful marketing value it used to have . . . The simple fact is that people buy *satisfactions*, not just *things*, and the subjective elements form an intrinsic part of the satisfaction of buying, having or using a product. Once purchasing power is more than enough to satisfy the basic objective wants . . . the surplus will often go into buying more satisfying forms of things.

### *Advertising in a Changing World.*

\* \* \*

Nearly 60 per cent. of all the furniture sold in this country is bought under hire-purchase agreements. The furniture industry bore the brunt of the very first restriction imposed last year by Mr. Butler and sales have been doing badly ever since. Production in the first three month of this year was 12 per cent. down on the same period last year, while unemployment in the industry is, according to the latest estimates, about 9,000 and short time over 13,000 out of a total labour force of about 100,000. Some 30 or 40 firms have closed down altogether, while others maintain only a skeleton staff.

### *The New Look in Furniture.*

\* \* \*

. . . The consumer did not in fact benefit very greatly from the 20 per cent. rise in the gross domestic product between 1948 and 1954, although the last three years were much better than the previous five. Total consumers' expenditure in real terms (revalued at 1948 factor cost) rose by only 12 per cent. while exports rose by 39 per cent., Government expenditure by 31 per cent. and capital investment by 26 per cent.

### *The Rise in Expenditure on Food.*

\* \* \*

It is not only important just to have a television set or a washing-machine or a motor-car any longer. It is also imperative that it should be the latest model. There is a simple reason for this; the latest model is infinitely superior to the old. Nine-inch television screens are as outdated as T model Fords. . . The slogan is "something new and different." . . . We in Britain are in the process of developing a "gimmick" economy, a liking for gadgets—much on the same lines as the Americans did a decade

ago. And in this phase of industrial progress, the British electrical industry will be able to supply better and more highly developed products, produced economically because its market is an ever-increasing mass potential.

### *Prospective Demands for Durable Household Goods.*

\* \* \*

Despite the introduction of atomic energy, it has been authoritatively estimated that we shall still need, by the year 2000, more coal than we are producing now.

### *The Efforts to Solve the Coal Output Problem.*

\* \* \*

. . . Middle East markets are some of the most political in the world—in the sense that the future of the exporter to this area may often be as much dictated by political or diplomatic action as by economic developments and his own efforts. The last few years, for example, have seen Persia removed from the scene as a major importer for a considerable period, they have seen exports to Egypt temporarily decline through political causes, and the pattern of trade within the area distorted by the continuing mutual hostility of Israel and the Arab States.

### *Britain's Markets in the Middle East.*

\* \* \*

At the moment, then, it looks very much as if most of the extra money received by consumers is being fully withdrawn from them by higher purchase tax, higher rents, higher fuel and transport charges, higher prices for unsubsidised bread, and higher Customs and Excise duties on tobacco. In short, for 1956 as a whole, the total value of retail sales will probably increase by at least another £400 millions, but the volume of goods handled may well decline by 3 to 4 per cent.

### *New Ideas and Methods in Retail Distribution.*

\* \* \*

There has been a switch away from novels and towards serious instructional works. The popularity of books which tell one how to make money out of fretwork, or how to cater for a restaurant, has never been so

great as it is to-day. It is worth noting that these are books which appeal most to the night school student.

### *The Changing Market for Books.*

\* \* \*

Although some two million houses have been built since 1945 there is still a housing shortage which is clearly apparent to anyone who wishes to rent a house or a flat. Just how big a housing shortage remains no one seems to know. And, indeed, in terms of effective demand in relation to the supply or stock of houses, the shortage is a variable figure. If rents of controlled houses were raised to-day to an economic level the greater use made of the dearer space would materially diminish the demand for accommodation. Again, two or three deflationary years could reduce the marriage rate and diminish the demand springing from new families.

### *Meeting the Housing Shortage.*

\* \* \*

Television has been a primary factor in the changing social habits—so much so that it has tended to make a large proportion of the population anti-social. Especially is this the case during the winter evenings when families settle themselves around the television set, with the result that visitors are not welcomed with open arms if they arrive during the family's favourite programme. Consequently, calling on friends for a chat or a game of cards is not now the order of the day. The reduction in the number of social evenings means less "dressing up" so that consequently wardrobes are less filled than they used to be.

### *Expenditure on Clothing.*

\* \* \*

The risk capital crisis that has been continually forecast . . . has still not come to pass. In the early post-war years, this was partly due to the fact that the nationalisation Acts removed a large block of risk shares into the category of gilt-edged; it is an enormous change in the post-war capital market that the huge annual borrowings of the transport, electrical and gas industries are no longer financed by issued of risk securities.

### *The Future of the British Capital Market.*

# SOVIET POST-MORTEM ON STALIN

(From "Soviet News," July 3rd, 1956).

By taking a determined stand against the cult of the individual and its consequences, and by openly criticising the errors it caused, the party has once more demonstrated its loyalty to the immortal principles of Marxism-Leninism, its loyalty to the interests of the people, its concern for providing the best possible conditions for the development of party and Soviet democracy in the interest of the successful building of communism in this country. The central committee of the C.P.S.U. places on record the fact that the discussions on the cult of the individual and its consequences by party organisations and at general meetings of working people have been marked by a great measure of activity, shown both by the party membership and by non-party people, and that the C.P.S.U. central committee's line has been welcomed and supported wholly and entirely both by the party and by the people.

\* \* \*

While the Soviet Union has been doing, and is still doing, very much to bring about a relaxation in international tension—and this is now recognised everywhere—American monopoly capital continues to assign large sums of money for strengthening the subversive activities in the socialist countries.

We must soberly appraise this fact and draw the necessary conclusions from it. It is clear, for instance, that the anti-popular riots in Poznan have been paid for from this source. But the agents-provocateur and subversive elements who were paid out of the overseas funds had enough "go" in them only for a few hours. The working people of Poznan resisted the hostile actions and provocations. The plans of the dark knights of the "cloak and dagger" have fallen through, their dastardly provocation against the people's power in Poland has failed. All future attempts at subversive actions in the people's democracies are similarly doomed to failure, even though such actions are generously paid for out of funds assigned by the American monopolies. This money may be said to be spent in vain.

\* \* \*

J. V. Stalin, who held the post of general secretary of the party's central committee for a long period, worked actively in common with other leading officials of the party to put into effect Lenin's behests. He was faithful to Marxism-Leninism, and as a theorist and an organiser of high calibre he led the party's fight against the Trotskyites, right-wing opportunists, and bourgeois nationalists, against the intrigues of capitalists from without. It was in this political and ideological fight that Stalin earned great authority and popularity. But there was a mistaken practice to associate all our great victories with his name. The achievements

gained by the Communist Party and by the Soviet Union, the eulogies of Stalin made him dizzy. That being the situation, the cult of the person of Stalin was being gradually built up.

\* \* \*

Some of J. V. Stalin's individual qualities, which were regarded as negative yet by V. I. Lenin, contributed in great measure to building up the cult of the individual. Towards the end of 1922 Lenin said in a letter to the coming party congress:

"Comrade Stalin, after taking over the post of general secretary, accumulated in his hands immeasurable power, and I am not certain whether he will be always able to use this power with the required care." In addition to this letter, written early in January, 1923, V. I. Lenin reverted to some of Stalin's individual qualities, intolerable in a leader. "Stalin is excessively rude," Lenin wrote, "and this defect, which can be freely tolerated in our midst and in contacts among us, communists, becomes a defect which cannot be tolerated in one holding the post of general secretary. I therefore propose to the comrades to consider the method by which to remove Stalin from his post, and to select another man for it who, above all, would differ from Stalin in only one quality, namely, greater tolerance, greater loyalty, greater politeness and a more considerate attitude towards the comrades, a less capricious temper, etc."

\* \* \*

These letters of Lenin's were brought to the knowledge of the delegations to the 13th Party Congress which met soon after Lenin died. After discussing these documents it was recognised as desirable to leave Stalin in the position of general secretary on the understanding, however, that he would heed the critical remarks of V. I. Lenin and draw all the proper conclusions from them.

\* \* \*

Having retained the post of general secretary of the central committee, Stalin did take into account the critical remarks of Vladimir Ilyich during the period immediately following his death. Later on, however, Stalin, having overestimated his own merits beyond all measure, came to believe in his own infallibility. He began transferring some of the limitations of party and Soviet democracy, unavoidable in conditions of a bitter struggle against the class enemy and its agents, and subsequently during the war against the Nazi invaders, into the standards of party and governmental life, grossly flouting the Leninist principles of leadership. Plenary meetings of the central committee and congresses of the party were held irregularly and later were not held at all for many years. Stalin, in fact, was above criticism.

It is precisely in these conditions that, among other things, a special status was created for the state security organs, which enjoyed tremendous trust because they had rendered undoubted services to the people and the country in defending the gains of the revolution. For a long time the state security organs justified this trust and their special status evoked no danger. The situation changed after Stalin's personal control over them had been gradually substituted for control by the party and the government, and the usual exercise of the standards of justice was not infrequently replaced by his individual decisions. The situation became still more aggravated when the criminal gang of the agent of international imperialism, Beria, got to the head of the state security organs. Serious violations of Soviet law and mass repressions were committed. As a result of the machinations of our enemies, many honest communists and non-party people had been slandered and suffered, although completely innocent.

\* \* \*

It should also be borne in mind that many facts about and wrong actions of Stalin, particularly in the sphere of violating Soviet law, became known only lately, already after Stalin's death, chiefly in connection with the exposure of Beria's gang and the establishment of party control over the security organs. "The party of the revolutionary proletariat" V. I. Lenin pointed out "is sufficiently strong to openly criticise itself, to a call a mistake a mistake, and a weakness a weakness" (Works, Vol. 21, Page 150). Guided by this Leninist principle, our party will continue, in future too, boldly to disclose, openly to criticise, and resolutely to eliminate mistakes and blunders in its work.

\* \* \*

The question may arise: Why then had these people not come out openly against Stalin and removed him from leadership? In the prevailing conditions this could not be done. The facts unquestionably show that Stalin was guilty of many unlawful acts that were committed particularly in the last period of his life.

Any question to him under these circumstances would not have been understood by the people and it was not at all a matter of lack of personal courage. It is clear that everyone who in these circumstances would have come out against Stalin would have got no support from the people. What is more, such opposition would have been evaluated, in those circumstances, as being against the cause of building Socialism, as an extremely dangerous threat to the unity of the party and the whole state in conditions of capitalist encirclement.

## CHATTEL SLAVE SOCIETY

*Slavery a very old institution.*

- (1) Its probable origin. (2) Its advantages at the dawn of civilization. (3) Its evil effects later.

*Factors enabling Civilization to develop.*

- (1) Prolific soil and water supply. (2) Presence of natural resources in minerals, etc. (3) Easy channels for communication and commerce—(a) Sea, rivers, caravan routes. (b) System of writing for recording and conveying information. (4) Animals capable of domestication.

*Settlement necessary before Civilization was possible.*

- (1) Knowledge of Agriculture. (2) Development of means of storage. (3) Progress in the arts of architecture, etc. (4) All early civilizations were city states.

*Some outstanding Ancient Civilizations.*

- |                 |         |             |            |
|-----------------|---------|-------------|------------|
| (1) Babylonian, | approx. | 3,000-6,000 | years ago. |
| (2) Egypt,      | "       | 3,000-6,000 |            |
| (3) Crete,      | "       | 3,300-3,900 |            |
| (4) Greece      | "       | 2,000-3,000 |            |
| (5) Rome        | "       | 1,500-2,500 |            |

*Geographical conditions were a factor in moulding them.*

- (1) Influence of mountains on Babylonia and Greece. (2) Of rivers on Babylonia and Egypt. (3) Of the sea on Crete, Greece and Rome. (4) Of the climate on the people and their products.

*The Social Systems.*

- (1) Agriculture the basis. (2) Private property safeguarded. (3) Division into

classes. Position of the chattel slaves. (5) Political organisation. (6) commercial activities (prominence of usury).

*Economic Objects of Wars.*

- (1) Plunder and tribute. (2) Slaves. (3) Securing of sources of supply. (4) Clearing of trade routes. (5) Destruction of trade competitors.

*Wealth and Achievements.*

- (1) Hanging Gardens of Babylon. (2) Pyramids of Egypt. (3) Palaces of Crete. (4) Philosophy and Art of Greece. (5) Legal and Government Institutions of Rome.

*Influence of Chattel Slavery on Decay of Ancient Civilization. Modernity of some of the ideas and ways of the ancient peoples. Continuity of social development and the legacies of the past.*

## FEUDALISM

### A. FACTUAL.

#### 1. Antecedents.

- (a) East (Egypt, Asia, Mediterranean) Peasant despotisms and peasant democracies, with chattel slavery and some serfdom.  
(b) West—Patriarchal Communism. The Mark Commune in Agriculture.

#### 2. Technical Basis.

Agriculture supplemented by cattle-rearing. Bronze and iron used for ploughshares and weapons.

#### 3. Ethical Period.

Upper Stage of Barbarism and beginning of civilization—family patriarchal to monogamic.

#### 4. Organisation.

- (a) Roman origins, Existence of debtor and creditor led to Patrocinium tenure. Bribery and corruption of declining Roman slave economy leads to welcoming of barbarian invaders by Roman peasants.  
(b) Frankish developments. Charles Martel commandeered Church lands to subsidise mounted forces to meet Saracen invasion. This led to Precarium tenure in Franc.  
(c) Classes—(1) Agricultural—King, Barons (tenants-in-chief or tenants-in-mense). Freemen—

not tied to land. Villeins—owned about 30 acres. Bordars (or cottars)—cultivated 3 to 10 acres, and also hired themselves for wages.

(2) Commercial—Guild-Masters; journeymen; apprentices.

- (d) 1086—Domesday Book. 1215 Magna Carta. The Jews' first appearance in England. 1265—Simon de Montfort and Model Parliament.

#### 5. Decline in England.

- (a) Germs of Capitalism. Wool Trade with Flanders. Sheep-rearing led to enclosures. Growth of Commerce and money economy. Expanding markets.  
(b) 1348—Black Death. Peasant unrest. One-third of population perish in Black Death. Labour shortage. Attempt to reimpose Labour Dues. 1381—Wat Tyler's Rebellion. 1450—Jack Cade's Rebellion.

### B. IDEOLOGICAL.

1. Religion. Social hierarchy reflected in clerical and heavenly hierarchy. Philosophy and speculation subordinated to theology. Church enormously wealthy and powerful. Serfdom God-ordained.

(Concluded on page 203)

(Continued from page 205)

conclude, then, that this basic law of the dialectic cannot offer any adequate account of natural phenomena—still less can it claim to embody the methodological principles of science.

The fundamental error of Engels was to take the contradictions involved in the thinking process and transfer them to physical processes. Had he, like Hegel, made them part of the development of God, he would at least have been consistent, if no less mystical. To offer them as a universal law governing all phenomena is sheer mythology.

Engels has been taken over by the Communists, and *Anti-Duhring* and *The Dialectics of Nature* are their text books. To what extent this is so, one discovers only by reading Haldane's blurb in the preface to *Dialectics of Nature*, where he claims that Engels anticipated many important scientific developments. My own view is that Engels's materialism, embroidered as it was with dialectical fripperies, was metaphysical. It was Lenin and those who followed him who closely associated themselves with Engels's views in the mistaken belief that they were interpreting Marxist materialism.

In the next issue it may be possible to deal with Engels's views on motion and his concept of absolute and relative truth. Finally, I do not consider that Marxism requires a philosophy of dialectical material, whether it come from Engels, Dietzgen or Lenin—but of this, more anon.

E.W.